

Radioing into the Silence by falafelfiction

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Summary:

Mike looks out of the window at Hawkins lab and sees Hopper calling someone in his police cruiser. He wants to know who the Chief was talking to. He wants to use his radio to call someone himself. Missing scene from 'The Spy'.

Radioing into the Silence

Author's Note:

So this fic was inspired by my yearning for more Hopper and Mike scenes. I found it particularly frustrating rewatching S2 when I realized that Mike and Hop were together at the lab for two episodes and never had a proper interaction during that time. I feel like the writers missed a golden opportunity to have their characters connect, specifically over El, before their big confrontation in the final episode. I just have a big soft spot for the way these two agonize over El.

“Who were you calling?” asked Mike.

Hopper halted, blinking down at the kid in his path. He’d just walked through about a dozen corridors of Hawkins lab, expecting to be stopped and asked this exact question. But it seemed like his secret call to the cabin had gone unchecked by every suit, soldier and scientist in the building. He thought he’d gotten away with it. He thought nobody had seen.

But now he had Mike Wheeler blocking his way and looking ready to get on his case.

“What? Nobody,” Hopper said, stalling. “How did you even...”

“I saw you through the window. On your police radio. Who were you calling?”

“I was just...it was a quick message my deputies,” he answered at last. “I was letting them know I wouldn’t be coming into the station today.”

“But you weren’t quick,” Mike pointed out. “And it didn’t look like you were talking to other cops either.”

“Yeah, what did it look like?” he scoffed, like it was ridiculous he

even had to explain himself.

“It looked...personal,” said Mike. His expression softened and he added, “It looked like you were upset.”

Hopper bit the inside of his cheeks and quickly looked away, worried that his eyes were bloodshot and would give away that he'd just been crying. He hadn't cried in years. He didn't think he still had it in him to shed actual tears. But then again, he'd spent the previous evening in a toxic tunnel being slowly throttled by fleshy freak vines from another dimension. And the whole time he'd been lying there, awaiting his stupid death, he'd been thinking of the little girl he'd left alone in a cabin with nothing but his harsh words to remember him by.

“I've had an upsetting night, kid. We all have...” He nodded to Will's room at the end of the hall. “How's your friend doing?”

Mike cast a fearful glance over his shoulder. “He said he could still feel the burning. The doctors came in a few minutes ago and gave him another dose of those sedatives. So he's sleeping again now. Mrs Byers and Bob are with him. I told the doctors I wanted to talk to you, but they won't let me passed those doors. You're the only one they're letting through.”

He frowned. “What do you want to talk to me about?”

“What do you think? I want to use to your radio. I need to make some calls too.”

Hopper opened his mouth to immediately refuse. Then a thought struck him. It was mid-afternoon now. It'd be dark within the next few hours. He could really do with getting Mike home before evening set in, else the kid could be stuck here for another night. A *school* night with the Wheeler parents panicking about where their son was and wondering why he hadn't called them.

As Hopper was thinking this, the double doors opened and the soldiers parted to let Doctor Owens into the hall. Hopper glanced at Mike again.

"Let me see what I can do," he said in sotto to the kid.

Mike nodded eagerly as Hopper stopped Owens on his way through to Will's room.

"Hey Doc! Would it be okay to take this kid outside?" asked Hopper, clapping Mike on the shoulder. "I was thinking I'd radio my deputies and have them call his parents."

He felt Mike flinching under his palm. "Hey wait, it's not my parents who I want to..."

"One second..." said Hopper, holding up a finger to shush him. "Because I was thinking, Doc...we'd better arrange for this kid's parents to come here and collect him. Otherwise they'll most likely be calling in a missing child report. I mean...this kid doesn't really need to be here, right?"

Mike reached up and shoved Hopper's hand off his shoulder.

"Yeah, I need to be here!" he objected. "I'm not leaving Will!"

"Would you pipe down?" Hopper hissed. "I'm trying to..."

"Sorry Chief," Owen cut in. "But the boy's right. He does need to be here. I'm afraid we'll be keeping all of you here for the time being. You know how it is. We're short staffed on the weekends. Our secretaries have been working around the clock, typing up new confidentiality forms...but it may be a little longer before they're approved and ready for you to sign. We just need to keep our secrecy agreements updated, especially with you bringing that Newby fellow into the mix. We have to keep these things from spreading."

Hopper rolled his eyes. "Yes, I know that. The kid knows that too. But if his parents don't know where he is, don't you think that'll cause more problems?"

"I already told my mom I was sleeping over at Will's all weekend," said Mike. "They won't even miss me until late tonight."

Owens smiled. "There you go, Chief. He's sorted out his own cover story."

“But I still really need to call...” Mike began to say.

Hopper held up his hand again to silence the pedantic child.

“How about you just let me take the kid out for a walk then?” he suggested. “You know...let him get some air? You’ve had him cooped up in this hospital room since last night.”

Owens puffed out his cheeks, considering. “Is that really necessary?”

“He needs a break, Doc. He’s restless and freaked out over what’s happening to his friend. Come on, you know what kids are like...”

“I’m happily childless...” Owens sighed. “Hold on.”

The Doctor turned back to the doors and wandered over to talk to the two soldiers posted there to guard Will's family and friends. Hopper glanced back at Mike who now had his hands stuffed in his pockets and was side-eyeing him in irritation, clearly nettled by Hopper’s attempts to have him sent home. Hopper wasn’t about to apologize. He was just looking out for the kid’s safety. One less kid in this fucking lab the better. Especially this kid. This kid who Hopper already had reasons to feel guilty over.

“Okay, you’ve got twenty minutes...” said Owens, returning to them. “You can take the boy out onto our grounds, but not beyond the main gates. And I don’t want him making any calls. It’s like I said, Hop... we’ve got to prevent this thing from spreading.”

“You’ve already let it spread!” Mike snapped at the doctor, suddenly losing his temper. “That gate you opened to the Upside Down? All the dark creepy stuff that comes out of that place has spread for miles around. It’s growing under the fucking town!”

It didn’t help Hopper’s nerves, the way these kids could change moods in a split second and suddenly be yelling their heads off. But it wasn’t like he could object to Mike’s rant or his harsh language. He’d been wanting to say the same things to the Hawkins lab staff, expletives and all.

Owens just sighed again, narrowing his eyes on Mike.

"You're Nancy Wheeler's brother, right?" he warily inquired.

"Yeah. So what?" Mike spat back at him.

"So I guess it runs in the family..." He turned back to Hopper. "Definitely no calls. Take him for a walk around the building if you must, but I'll be expecting you to keep an eye on him. I don't want any juvenile mischief. From *either* of you. Now if you'll excuse me..."

Doctor Owens stepped around them, heading for Will's room, while the soldiers held open the doors as per their orders. Hopper and Mike hurried out of the closed quarters into the larger hallway. Once they got into the stairwell, Mike turned to Hopper again.

"So who were you *really* calling?" he asked.

Hopper squinted at the kid. "What?"

"On your police radio," said Mike, all conspiratorial, like he imagined the only reason Hopper hadn't told him before was because those soldiers were still in earshot. "Who were you really contacting?"

"You don't need to know," Hopper muttered.

"Fine. Don't tell me. Just run interference and get us to your car."

"Kid, are you deaf? You're not making any damn calls!"

"Who's side are you on?!" Mike exploded, wheeling round on the landing.

Hopper stared at him a moment. Then he took a step forward, using his considerable height advantage to loom over the boy.

"Who's side am I on? I'm on the side that's been keeping all of you safe this last year."

Mike raised his eyebrows, not looking intimidated in the least.

"Oh yeah?" he scoffed. "And how do you define *safe* exactly?"

"I define it as we're still alive. Who do you want to call anyway?"

Mike dropped his eyes, suddenly looking shifty. “Just Dustin...Lucas.”

Hopper was already shaking his head, continuing his march down the stairs.

“No way. I don’t need any more of you little punks involved in this.”

“They’re already involved!” Mike protested, following him. “I called them both to a party meeting on Friday. Then we all went off on our separate missions to acquire more knowledge.”

He frowned. “More knowledge? For what?”

“For helping Will, *duh...*” Mike sneered.

“The doctors are helping Will,” Hopper snapped back.

“How are they helping?! By making Will feel like he’s *on fire*?”

Hopper found he couldn’t argue with that. Kid was right. These doctors were useless quacks.

“What missions did you send your little friends on?” he asked instead.

Mike looked at him haughtily. “You don’t need to know.”

Brat, thought Hopper. He might’ve known the Wheeler kid would be a brat too, not to mention a control freak. Not that Hopper could really resent him for the latter. It...it takes one to know one. Oh yeah, it wasn’t like Hopper didn’t understand where Mike was coming from. He understood only too well how this kid craved control and how losing it made him frantic. Hopper seemed to recall that thirty or forever years ago he’d been an outspoken little hothead too. Sure, he’d run with the jocks at school and would’ve been the first to push a scrawny nerd like Wheeler in the dirt. But in all other respects Mike reminded him so much of the impossibly stubborn boy he’d once been.

“Listen,” said Hopper. “I don’t need you kids going off on any more missions, okay? I don’t need a bunch of thirteen year olds trying to take charge of this situation. How many times do I have to say this?”

It's the grown-ass adults who are in charge here."

But Mike just shook his head, marching off ahead of him. He pushed through the glass doors that took them outside onto the lawn that surrounded the fortress of a lab. Hopper followed him onto the grass, pulling the blanket tighter around his shoulders. The air outside was getting colder every minute and the flimsy scrubs they'd given him to wear were thin as napkins.

After a moments adjustment, Hopper caught up with Mike, grabbing him by his hood.

"Hey, hey...slow down. What I need you to do is to take some deep breaths. I need you to clear your head and walk it off...if you really want to be there for your friend then you'd better stop worrying about everything else. Just focus on Will."

Mike shook himself free of Hopper's grasp. "But I still need to..."

"No, I told you! No calls to Dustin or Lucas."

"They're not the only ones I need to call!" Mike blurted out.

Hopper frowned. "Well who the hell *else*?"

Mike was suddenly lost for words and avoiding Hopper's stare.

"Never mind. You...you wouldn't understand."

The kid turned away from him then. He started walking off at a brisk pace towards the high barb wire fence that surrounded the Hawkins lab facility. Confused and curious, Hopper began to follow, but Mike threw a reproachful glare over his shoulder.

"Just back off a little, would you?" he hissed at him.

"Hey, you heard what the doctor said..." Hopper reminded him. "He wants me tailing you. What are you *doing*, kid? Is there someone you can call out here without a phone or a radio?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact!" said Mike, rounding on him. "If...if she's listening..."

The kid winced, looking like he regretted his words the moment they'd spilled from his mouth. He probably hadn't meant to say anything. But he was tired. He hadn't slept properly last night, maybe for the last few nights, maybe for the last year. And now his face was pale, there were dark circles under his eyes and he was fraying at the edges. Hopper swallowed. He should've known. Really, he should've known. He knew that El had been paying her little psionic visits on a regular basis. He knew El received messages back from Mike too. He'd just never fully considered their connection from Mike's side before. He never imagined Mike would be aware of the girl's presence in any way...

Jesus, the girl must've been driving him insane.

"Eleven," Hopper said softly. "You're talking about Eleven."

"It's like she...she can channel me," said Mike, struggling to explain himself. "She's done it before. Wherever she is now, she's still listening. She's listening for *me*..."

"And how do know that?" he asked.

"I just know! Or...I don't know. I just feel it sometimes. I feel her. And I don't care if you think I'm crazy. If there's even a chance she's listening, I have to keep calling."

"Right now?" said Hopper, staring over the empty stretch of grass.

Mike shrugged. "I've never missed a day."

The kid turned his back on Hopper again and strode towards the fence, tense as a caged animal. Hopper didn't follow him this time. He gave Mike his space. Or...at least he gave him the illusion of privacy. Because Hopper happened to have a very keen sense of hearing. So when Mike started talking to the wire fence and thin air around him, Hopper could just about hear every word that the kid said. He felt guilty for overhearing him. Like he was intruding on a very intimate prayer.

"El...are you there?" Mike began. "Sorry, I...I couldn't get hold of a radio. But if you're listening now, I don't need one, right?" He paused

a moment, unsure, then pressed on. "It's day 357. I'm still here. I'll always be here. I...I had another bad day today. More than a bad day. Things are totally crazy. It turns out I was right. Will does have a connection with the shadow monster. Not only can Will see what he sees...but Will also feels what he feels. And that...that really sucks, you know? It means I basically spent last night and most of today watching my best friend writhe around in pain. And nobody can do anything for him. Nobody can stop it. Not the doctors. Not *me*..."

Hopper heard Mike's voice catch. He looked over in concern. But Mike was straight backed and swallowing hard. There were tears inside this kid for sure. A deep well of tears and a bubbling cauldron of rage too. But Mike wasn't letting his emotions get the better of him. Not now. Not when he only had twenty minutes.

"I...I promised him, El," said Mike. "I promised Will I wouldn't let the shadow monster spy back. But I don't know if it's a promise I can keep. You'd know all about that, right? About the promises I make but can't keep? Oh God, El...I'm scared I'm going to lose him too. Maybe I already have? When he's awake, when I'm talking to him... I'm not even sure it's Will anymore."

Mike pressed a hand over his mouth, literally gagging the feelings that were threatening to surge up out of him. Hopper couldn't stand back and watch anymore. He knew only too well what Mike was going through. He'd talked to thin air like this before too. This was the way he'd spoken to Sara for the last few years. Of course, Mike believed that El was still alive, that she was still out there somewhere, listening to him. But it wasn't like Hopper ever acknowledged his daughter had died either. Whenever he spoke of Sara, it was in the present tense. He'd say she was living with her mom in the city. That he didn't see her anymore, but she was doing fine, she was doing great...

"I...I don't feel her today," said Mike, sensing Hopper behind him. "She doesn't feel close at all..."

Of course, Hopper thought. There must be so many times when the two of them missed each other. When they were both just calling out into the void. But even if El wasn't there to hear him, Mike still needed this. He needed his little ritual of voicing his fears and

frustrations. It seemed like the kid didn't have anyone else who'd listen to him. At least nobody he thought would understand.

"Hey," said Hopper, reaching out a hand. "Hey Mike..."

It was so rare for Hopper to call any of the little ones by their first names rather than using the generic term 'kid'. It got Mike's attention for sure. His head whipped around, just as Hopper was laying a gentle hand on his shoulder. The boy looked up to him, his eyes wide and nakedly begging him for reassurance. *This kid trusts me*, Hopper realized. However much Mike argued and talked back, he still trusted him. Mike had trusted him since that day almost a year ago when Hopper had contacted him on his Supercom and convinced him to reveal where he was hiding, so that Hopper could get out there to protect both him and the girl. Mike had answered that day out of trust and it was his trust that really got to Hopper now. Because the truth was he'd lied to Mike more than any other adult in his life.

But still Hopper gave Mike's shoulder a squeeze like they were on the same side.

"Will's going to be okay, you know," he said. "We'll make sure of it."

He felt Mike shudder. "He barely knew my name. He didn't know you at all."

"We got him out of a dark place before, didn't we? We can do it again."

Mike held his stare, nodding. Hopper felt a surge of strength returning to the kid.

"*Shit* yeah we can," said the boy, his teeth barred and eyes blazing.

Hopper had to smile at that. Really. This Wheeler kid had balls of solid rock.

"She'd be proud of you, you know that?" he said without thinking.

Mike blinked up at him. "Huh?" he said, perplexed.

"Your girl," Hopper blundered on. "If she saw the way you were

watching over Will. She'd be proud."

Mike frowned, stepping back a pace. "How would you know?"

Hopper's heart caught as he remembered. Of course. In Mike's world he was a person who hardly knew El. As far as Mike knew Hopper had spent only a bare few hours in the same room as the girl. He'd never spent any personal time with her. At least, as far as Mike knew...

"What I mean is," Hopper faltered. "If the girl were here now. If she weren't lost or...or wherever she is. If she could see you, I think she'd be proud. I don't know, kid..." He put his hand to his head, rubbing his temples. "I'm proud of you, okay? Maybe that's what I'm trying to say. *I'm proud.*"

Hopper only gave this compliment to get out of another lie. But Mike's face tensed up on hearing it. Hopper got the feeling he hadn't heard those words from his parents any time recently. From what Hopper gathered, Mike had been having a rough year. Detentions after school, behavior report cards and regular groundings from going out with his friends. Hopper was always promising El he'd check on Mike, make sure he was doing okay. But over the last year that hadn't actually consisted talking to Mike. It'd meant one-night stands with Middle School teachers or friends of the Wheeler family who'd given him the latest gossip on the local kid who (rumor had it) had once hidden a Russian spy in his basement.

Oh yes, they'd all heard the rumors. If the parents, teachers and nosy neighbors of Hawkins ever spoke about Mike then it was with scandal and disapproval. They had no idea what this kid had been through. They had no clue of the things he'd seen and done. None at all.

But Hopper knew. He knew this kid had kept El safe before he'd even met her.

He guessed that he really was proud of Mike for that.

"Thanks Chief..." Mike said in a quiet voice before lowering his head.

Hopper noticed the boy was shivering. From the cold and so much

more. So he shrugged the blanket off his shoulders and wrapped it around Mike instead. He kept one hand on his shoulder and steered him back towards the main entrance of the lab. Their twenty minutes had to be up by now. They needed to get back inside.

You need to tell the kid, thought Hopper as they approached the doors. *You need to tell him right now...*

But he glanced up at the security cameras pointing out over the lab's perimeter and he knew that he couldn't say a damn thing. He knew that when he finally got around to telling Mike that El was alive and well and had been right here in town for a year, there was going to be hell to pay. He tried imagining how he might feel if...if Sara had lived. If his little girl had lived but something had taken her away and then *someone* had kept her a secret from him. Hopper thought that if that'd happened to him, then he'd probably want to kill that someone with his bare hands.

He wouldn't blame Mike if he felt the same. But he still couldn't tell him. Not here and now. He couldn't risk the kid's resulting outburst being caught on those lab cameras. But at least he understood what he'd been putting Mike through. He felt like he'd always understood this thing from El's side. He understood that Mike was the first person in the world who the poor kid could call her friend. A boy her age who'd given her food, clothes and shelter when she'd been scared and alone. Who'd made her feel like a real girl, a *pretty* girl, not a lab experiment to be poked at and prodded. So of course El thought the sun shone out of Mike. And it turned out the boy felt the same about her.

They're too damn young, thought Hopper. *Too young to be feeling for each other so strongly.*

But at the same time Hopper felt relieved. Knowing that when El was lost in that head of hers and she was desperately calling into darkness, that there was someone out there calling back...calling to her with the same intensity and devotion.

Someone who was an awful lot like him.

